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ABSTRACT

The public schools have just been restructured based on insufficient information or ignored research. Now, with new education bills and laws, another restructuring is beginning. More thought should be put into the purpose of education in order to handle the crucial issues for such restructuring. For example, certification requirements for superintendents, principals, and special education teachers currently do not specify any knowledge concerning the world of work. In addition, the alternate, noncollege route for preparing vocational education teachers does not work to prepare them adequately, especially now that more integration of academic and vocational education is being sought. Recommendations include the following: (1) eliminate the separation between the vocational system and the rest of high school programs; (2) increase the requirements for teachers of special needs students and for principals to include knowledge of the world of work; (3) update and use the taxonomies for education based on the model developed in 1966 at Ohio State University and the University of Illinois (Towers, Lux, and Ray) to create curriculum for the school-to-work transition emphasis now being mandated by Congress; and (4) propose a balanced curriculum rather than switching from one discipline to another in educational emphasis. (Contains 17 references.) (KC)

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TESTIMONY

FOR

NEW JERSEY STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

March 16, 1994

by

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Thank you for allowing me to present some observations and recommendations for your consideration concerning the preparation of people for work and life. Dr. Annell Simcoe and I have strived via the graduate program in Vocational-Technical Education, Rutgers University, to serve those in vocational and technical education by teaching, research and service. Such service has become increasingly difficult because persons in the field have virtually ceased to increase their professional skills. Many persons in secondary schools have stated that they see no future in secondary vocational education.

In preparing some of my comments I have examined documents published by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, the September 1993 General Accounting Office report Transition from School to Work, Tanner's The Politics of Educational Reform in the December 1993 Phi Delta Kappan, many articles in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, etc. and have talked with persons in New Jersey and through out the nation.

As Harold Benjamin, a famous educator during the mid century stated to me, education is always in crisis. On my desk are at least six national surveys with the request for information concerning what industrial arts, home economics, vocational education, etc., should be. Two articles (Bracey, 1991; Tanner, 1993) that have descriptions stating that the public schools were doing well before the social planners caused change; even more damaging is Tanner's article that contains a description of the hiding of a national research report that stated public education was successful. In Indiana and Michigan the highway bill boards have advertisements for Tech-Prep. In New Jersey the signs in front of vocational high schools are being torn down and new signs proclaiming high tech are being installed. The word vocational has been dropped from the N. J. Department of Education title of offices. Yes we are in a continuous crisis.

In effect the public schools have just been restructured based on insufficient information or ignored research. Now with new education bills and laws another restructuring is beginning. The observations and recommendations below barely touch some of the crucial issues for another restructuring. Perhaps they will make persons think about what education is supposed to accomplish.

Observation: Certification requirements for superintendents, principals and special education teachers do not specify any knowledge concerning the world of work. Students in programs in administration and special education have stated to me, "We know we really need this knowledge to effectively serve our students. But there are no certification requirements and we are not going to

spend money out of our pocket to take extra courses." I might also add that in one of my jobs in the Graduate School of Education as Coordinator for Prestudent Teaching, I came into contact over a six year period with over 175 principals [nonvocational], prekindergarten through the 12th grade. To summarize many of the statements made, "I do not think the alternate route prepares teachers properly. But if I speak against this route and advocate the college/university route I will not have a job tomorrow." I have also had two vocational superintendents in New Jersey express discontent with the alternate route.

Observation: Superintendents and principals of vocational schools lobbied for the alternate route for teachers and have employed them via that route. They have found that too many teachers having fulfilled the basic requirements stop further professional development. [The alternate route was not designed for vocaticnal teachers.] Such a circumstance is a logical result of lowering the entrance requirements for teachers. Vocational teachers, specifically trade and industrial teachers, have traditionally entered teaching without the baccalaureate degree. These same teachers are being required to integrate academic education with vocational education and are not capable of doing so. As long as vocational educators are prepared outside the mainstream of formal education, i.e, college/university route, they will not be capable of fulfilling the role expected of them by society. While other disciplines are increasing the standards for teacher entrance the vocational education establishment seems to be lowering its standards.

Observation: I notice in the State of New Jersey Vocational Education Performance Report FY 1993 a number of professional development activities. All are outside the college/university mainstream. I do not know of any state so determined to conduct its entire professional development programs outside the college/university system. Such anti intellectual attitudes have severely damaged the image and substance of the vocational system in New Jersey. On the other hand, I am critical of many of the teacher education programs conducted in the past; programs that are labeled "the good old boy system." Professional level standards were missing too much in the college/university levels.

Recommendation: I urge a reexamination of the preparation of superintendents, principals and secondary vocational teachers. In fact, I predict the elimination of secondary vocational education if such preparation is not changed.

Recommendation: Students intending to teach special needs students certainly need knowledge concerning the world of employment and how to help their students find employment or education that will provide employment education.

Observation: Historically the recent, 1985-1992, reorganization of secondary vocational really began with the July 1989 National Assessment of Vocational Education by J. Wirt et al. in which they

wrote:

> Surprisingly, college-bound students take substantial amounts of vocational education--not just introductory industrial arts and consumer homemaking education, but occupationally specific vocational education. In fact, students planning to attend postsecondary...training or college account for the vast majority of vocational credits... (p. 49)

Wirt et al. also found that vocational education with integrated academics produced significant gains in academic skills.

Due to these findings Wirt et al. recommended that "Expanding its [vocational education] academic potential should be a major objective of federal policy" (p. 51). This expansion of the use of vocational education for teaching academic skills to all persons, especially to college bound, resulted in the virtual elimination of vocational education as historically defined in the secondary schools. Anne C. Lewis reported from the America's High School Sophomores: A 10-Year Comparison that:

> Comparisons of high school sophomores of 1980 and 1990 show that the number of students enrolled in vocational education plummeted from 21 percent to only 8 percent. The 1990 sophomore class also was one-fifth smaller than 10 years earlier and composed of more minority students and students from poverty-level families. (p. 10)

Have academic teachers failed because they cannot relate their subject content to the real world? I have made this assumption. Unfortunately, using one discipline to teach another discipline destroys the discipline used. Such is the case for vocational education.

Harry F. Silberman (1991) in his article Finishing an Unfinished Agenda best identifies the key problems and potential future of secondary vocational education. Silberman examined the 1984 recommendations for reform by the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education and other authors and futurists. As a result of this examination he wrote:

> Consequently, the goals of vocational education will become broader and will include more personal, social and intellectual components. (p. 31)

In discussing the potential of integration of academic and vocational education he expressed pessimism and stated that if resolutions cannot be achieved concerning expectations and image that, "high school science departments probably will inherit the responsibility for applied technology education and vocational education will continue to be viewed as a low-status social program for at-risk youth" (p. 31).

Recommendation: If one is concerned with the broader and more personal, social, and intellectual components as well as psychomotor skills that all persons may need, college or non-college bound, there is one model that could be reexamined and updated. In 1966 the Department of Industrial Technology, The Ohio State University and the University of Illinois (Towers, Lux, & Ray), produced a document that took two years to develop. The developers were educators who asked persons in business and industry what did students need to know in order to succeed in employment? As a result of that work a document was produced that spanned philosophies of education to taxonomies of human knowledge and practice. For example, one taxonomy was personnel practices that included functions of hiring, training, working, advancing, and retiring. Another taxonomy was industrial production technology. Other taxonomies were practices in construction and manufacturing. Two years of thinking went into a planning document before the first curriculum unit was written. I do not know of any other curriculum that was designed with so much prior examination of philosophy, questioning, and participation with business and industry. This document could be updated and used for restructuring that curriculum necessary to teach high school students knowledge and psychomotor skills needed for being flexible in the world of employment.

Recommendation: With the school to work transition emphasis by Congress I urge you to consider the above document for your thinking and implementing school to work curricula. Do not waste millions of dollars as was done in the career education movement in the 1970's. The ideas that linking secondary schools and community colleges, Tech-Prep, and increasing apprenticeship will solve the problems of students exploring the world of employment are insufficient. For one reason, there will not be enough apprenticeship sites available to serve millions of persons that social planners seem to assume that business and industry will provide. Cooperative education programs, which have been overlooked by social planners and politicians, have been insufficient to meet the needs of enough students and were never fully operated at a sufficient level of quality. What is needed is a balanced curriculum. What we have is a curriculum in which one technique, as apprenticeship, is hailed as the solution. In other words, Congress goes from one technique to another in trying to solve or prevent some social or economic ill. In the past there was life adjustment education, vocational education, and career education. Now there is math education, science education, and transition from school to work. Congress should propose a balanced curriculum rather than switch from one discipline to another.

Recommendation: I also recommend that each of you read <u>High School to Employment Transition: Contemporary Issues</u> (1994) edited by A. J. Pautler, Jr. and published by Prakken Publishers, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan. Much of what I would like to say to each of you is in that book and in my chapter in that book.

Questions: In 1990 in a chapter titled Postsecondary Occupational

Education I asked several questions. I believe these have relevance today:

> Several writers have suggested changes in the vocational curricula at the secondary level. Much of this change seems to be content covered by other existing curricula. Will vocational education lose its identity if the focus is moved from "job entry level" preparation?
>
> How can community colleges and technical institutes keep a balance between technical requirements and general education requirements so the students are prepared for life and work?
>
> Can an economy be self-sustaining based on a labor force having little or no early education in the psychomotor domain?
>
> Can an economy be self-sustaining based on a labor force that provides basic services, that only persons who are educationally, economically, and/or mentally and physically handicapped?
>
> Can a nation survive that makes using one's hands socially unacceptable? (Doty, p. 85)

Observation: Vocational educators made a big mistake in removing themselves from the mainstream of education after 1963. Their motives were understandable but the result was flawed. To build separate campuses and remove themselves from the comprehensive high school violated the underlying principle of public education. That principle is that public schools were to be a reflection of society in which students were to be taught to maintain a democratic society. Unfortunately other areas such as art and science are making the same mistake by building magnet schools. The ultimate result is the creation of a class system and the destruction of a democratic society.

Recommendation: Vocational educators should recognize this mistake and move to correct the separation.

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